

## City Bridge Trust – Monitoring Visit Report

<b>Organisation:</b> Thames21 Ltd	<b>Grant ref:</b> 10517 (CR)	<b>Programme area:</b> London's Environment\b) Biodiversity
<b>Amount, date and purpose of grant:</b> 28/04/2011: £150,000 over three years (£43,000; £50,000; £57,000) for the salary of a Project Officer and the related costs of a scheme developing and supporting local volunteering to improve the Thames and London's waterways.		
<b>Visiting Grants Officer:</b> Ciaran Rafferty – accompanied by Alderman Gowman and Ian Seaton	<b>Date of meeting:</b> 6 <sup>th</sup> January 2014	
<b>Met with:</b> Debbie Leach (CEO); Julia Makin (Project Officer until Jan 2014); Chris Coode (Senior Programmes Manager); Andrew Lobel (Project Officer from Jan 2014)		
<b>1. Introduction to the organisation:</b> Thames21 is the charitable company set up to conserve London’s rivers and canals and to improve the public’s knowledge and appreciation of the heritage, ecology and amenity they provide. The current charitable company was formed in 2004 though the organisation operated before this as a distinct project of the larger, national, charity ENCAMS. The organisation’s turnover in the past few years has been in the region of £1.5m. Its approach is to encourage, train and support local people as volunteers to look after the waterways of London so that the activity becomes more sustainable and less reliant on paid staff to do this work.		
<b>2. The project funded:</b> The current grant (which commenced in September 2011) is for a Project Officer to develop and support local volunteering to improve the Thames and its waterways. The aim is to develop a range of skills within volunteers themselves (either individually or in groups) so that they can successfully deliver a clean-up project. The project/grant commenced in September 2011.		
<b>3. Work delivered to date:</b> The ethos underpinning this project is the recognition that Thames21 – or any single organisation for that matter – would not, alone, be able to conserve and keep clean London’s waterways. Although the organisation is very effective at mobilising teams of volunteers across London, this process still requires daily, staffed, management and support. A more effective and sustainable approach is to train and empower volunteers themselves to organise and manage such activities – hence this project which aims to have more groups operating independently and with confidence.  People are often put off from taking action due to a lack of experience and confidence about working around water, particularly with regards to health and safety. The training programme – delivered to high, assessed, standards - responds directly to this need. Thames21 has an Investing in Quality licence, enabling trainees to gain a formal certificate (then badge). The basic course is called “Leading a Waterway Clean-up” an comprises two day-long sessions, after which people can take extra modules in, for example, water-quality testing, or reed-bed restoration. After the two-day basic course trainees can then sign up to be part of the organisation’s Event Support Team to gain more experience further develop their skills-base.		

#### **4. Difference made:**

So far, half of London's boroughs have been represented, with a correlation between people taking part and Thames21 having an existing or prior presence in their area. In the period Sept 2012 – Sept 2013 (year 2 of the grant) there were 212 people registered; 42 training sessions delivered (106 people attended one day; 73 attended both days). 18 trained groups are now operating independently and there were 57 events delivered by trained individuals or groups. 28 new recruits went on to join the Event Support Team. Groups vary in their composition and include individuals; "Friends of.."; partnerships; university students; corporate teams.

Thames21 is able to report that, on the whole, groups and events enjoy very positive relationships with land-owners, local authorities, etc. – relationships which need to be good in order to facilitate access to the water, for example, or for the removal of rubbish. The tidal Thames is less littered now than previously though there has been an increase in particular types of rubbish (e.g. plastic bottles) and often in hotspots (reflective of the particular currents and tides).

A consequence of the mobilisation of volunteers is that groups often will be established to tackle a particular issue (e.g. to clean up a waterway – "litter gets people angry!" in the words of the officer) but, after the project is completed, continue to meet, perhaps for social activities or to take on a new challenge. In this respect the project has been effective in general community development, helping reduce isolation for some people and increasing their networks and circle of friends.

A future development of the scheme (albeit requiring other resources) would be to offer individual groups access to storage and/or small equipment hire; as well as access to transport (small vans etc). There would also be some benefit in groups having access to small grants (£500/£1,000) to support their activities.

Other outcomes include an increase in biodiversity monitoring; greater knowledge of waterways amongst the public; and development of the Thames River Watch project.

#### **5. Grants Administration:**

Payments, paperwork, reporting etc. has all been fine and to time on both sides. It was suggested that the CBT funding/logo could be more prominently displayed on the organisation's website. The original postholder Julia (for whom payslips were seen) was due to move from this post into another one within the organisation although her replacement (Andrew) was present at this meeting, this being his first day in the job. The organisations stated that it felt the Trust was easy to deal with and welcomed the good and constructive relationship established over several years. It also felt that the Trust has played a significant role in the development of Thames21 over the years, whilst this particular project had increased its standing as an environmental charity and increased its partnerships with Londoners and local agencies.

#### **6. Concluding comments:**

Thames21 is the only agency which works for and across the Thames and London's waterways. It is held in high regard by other, key, agencies (including local authorities, corporates, government departments) and by the public who cherish and enjoy London's rich tapestry of rivers and canals. It consistently delivers effective and relevant projects – of which this is one – and is good at learning from its work and applying such learning to maintain its effectiveness.